

Christmas 2020

☞The Biblical Christmas story:

Sequence:	Luke 1; Matthew 1; Luke 2; Matthew 2
Luke 1:26-38ff	Gabriel visits Mary
Matthew 1:18-25	Angel visits Joseph in a dream
Luke 2:1-20ff	Jesus born; shepherds visit
Matthew 2:1-12ff	Magi visit; family escapes to Egypt

Can you separate fact from fiction in the Christmas story?

(Naomi reads questions; Phil gives answers)

1. ☞**The wise men were three kings from the orient.**

☞**False** - The number of wise men is not mentioned. Nothing in the bible indicates they were kings. We only know they traveled from the east, but not specifically the orient.

2. ☞**The wise men arrived on the night of Jesus' birth.**

☞**False** - The wise men arrived sometime after Jesus is born (Matthew 2:1). Jesus is called a child, rather than a baby (Matthew 2:11). He may have been as old as two (Matthew 2:7,16).

3. ☞**God sent a choir of chubby angels to announce Jesus' birth to the shepherds.**

☞**False** - Actually God sent an army of warrior angels. See Luke 2:13. "Company" and "host" are military terms.

4. ☞**Both Joseph and Mary were told that the baby was to be named "Jesus."**

☞**True** - Yes. See Matthew 1:21 and Luke 1:31. In Judaism, babies were always named by their father. Here we see God the Father (not Joseph) giving Jesus his name. By the way, "Jesus" is the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Joshua," the successor of Moses. (Joshua means "Yahweh saves").

5. ☞**After the angel's message the shepherds went straight to Bethlehem to see Jesus.**

☞**True** - Correct. They were excited! They did not hesitate. Luke 2:15-16.

☞ **Wise Men Still Seek Him**

Proverbs 4:7

Wisdom is supreme; therefore, get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.

☞ **Naomi**

The account of the Wise Men (written by a woman): If it had been 'Wise Women' instead of 'Wise Men', they would have asked directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole, and brought practical gifts from Baby's-R-Us, including diapers, wipes, bibs and formula. But that's an entirely different story...

☞ **Matthew 2:1-12**

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem **2** and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." **3** When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

☞ **4** When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. **5** "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: **6** "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'"

☞ **7** Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. **8** He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." **9** After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

☞ **10** When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. **11** On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. **12** And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

☞ **Phil**

Magi = wise men; philosophers; astronomers; scientists... We don't know very much about these men, but we can discern a few things.

☞ **They had knowledge of prophecy and they watched for signs.** The star is prominent in their account and it seems like some strange phenomenon in the sky. However, as far as we know, nobody else even noticed this event. These men were paying attention and noticed something unusual going on. In fact, historically, a number of philosophers were expecting a world ruler to come out of Israel. We also are expecting the arrival of our king. The bible gives a number of prophecies with signs to indicate the time is near. We should also be paying attention so that we are ready when Jesus returns.

☞Naomi

☞Matthew 24:42

Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

☞Phil

☞**They sought out the Lord.** From the biblical account we know that it was at least several months after Jesus was born before they arrived on the scene. Mary and Joseph were no longer in the stable, but rather were in a house when the wise men arrived. Jesus is referred to as a child instead of a baby. Herod wanted to kill Jesus, and after inquiring about the timing of the star, he killed all the boys in Bethlehem and the surrounding vicinity who were under 2 years old. So, Jesus could have been nearly 2 years old by the time they arrived.

☞Naomi

We can't say for certain, but it is possible that they traveled for several months if not more than a year, to find Jesus. When they got to Jerusalem, they asked questions in order to narrow their search. They didn't let King Herod's jealousy and corruption get in the way of their pursuit. They were determined to find Jesus.

☞Jeremiah 29:13

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

☞Phil

☞**They were humble and generous.** The NIV Study Bible pointed out that "Bringing gifts was particularly important in the ancient East when approaching a superior (cf. Ge 43:11; 1Sa 9:7-8; 1Ki 10:2)." These Magi viewed Jesus to be their superior, to say the least, and much more if you look closely at the gifts.

☞1. **Gold is a gift for a King.** Gold was as precious in that day as it is in our day. Were they not absolutely sure of the status of the one that they were seeking, would they risk giving away gold? Their faith is lived out through their gifts. Gold is a gift for a king.

☞2. **Frankincense is an incense burned to a God.** It was a common practice to burn incense as an offering to a God during this time in history. This may well speak to their view of Jesus, that he was more than just a king. You will note that they didn't bring gifts to Herod, who they also viewed to be a king.

☞3. **Myrrh was a burial spice.** Myrrh exudes from a tree found in Arabia and a few other places and was a much-valued spice and perfume used in embalming (Jn 19:39). This third gift is another very valuable gift, and may speak that they had knowledge of the purpose for which Jesus came.

☞Naomi

The gifts that we see here are gifts for a King, a God, and One who came to die. Their gifts speak multitudes. And, when they found Jesus in the house, they bowed down and

worshiped him. These obviously wealthy, powerful men humbled themselves before the Lord.

☞ **1 Peter 5:5-6**

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." **6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.**

☞ **Phil**

☞ **They were changed.** They returned to their country by another route. Of course, this is speaking of a physical direction, but doesn't it speak a spiritual reality to us as well? When people encounter Jesus, it changes them. When Jesus entered into the world, it altered the course of history. It split time in two. It began a second testament or covenant in the Bible. When Jesus enters the scene, people are changed.

☞ **Naomi**

☞ **2 Corinthians 5:17**

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

☞ **Phil**

We can learn a lot from these little-known wise men.

☞ **They were resolute.** They were watching and they were determined to find Jesus. Wise men still seek him today.

☞ **They were reverent.** When they found him, they bowed down and worshiped and gave generously. Wise men still worship him today.

☞ **They were rejoicing.** When they saw the star that second time, they were overjoyed. That's the essence of Christmas.

☞ **Luke 2:10-11**

I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people... a Savior has been born... the Messiah